

# CASE STUDY



*Inspiration for Presenting and Distributing Scents in Heritage Spaces*

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Jorg Hempenius performing as an Aroma Jockey. Photo credit Sofia Collette Ehrich.

## Jorg Hempenius

*Scent Expert and Founder of [iScent](https://www.iscent.nl/), the Netherlands*

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### WEBSITE:

<https://www.iscent.nl/over-iscent/>

<http://www.museumbeleving.nl/>

A big challenge of olfactory storytelling is finding the best way to present and distribute the scents safely and efficiently within heritage environments. Scent expert, Jorg Hempenius has been solving these challenges for more than a decade and has come up with many creative methods for presentation.

## *Who is Jorg Hempenius?*

[Jorg Hempenius](#) is the founder of [iScent](#). He is a scent expert based in the Netherlands who has been working in the fragrance industry for twelve years. Hempenius creates custom fragrances and explores the practical dissemination and distribution of such scents in a wider physical curatorial context. You can learn more about Jorg's work with heritage institutions on his website [Museum Beleving](#) (Dutch).

## *What types of smell distribution methods has iScent offered heritage institutions in the past?*

Hempenius uses two main methods of diffusion which are passive diffusion meaning via a spray or machine and active diffusion meaning that people have to interact in some way. This is usually via a nested box or a hand or a foot pump. In his experience, most heritage institutes prefer when the odourant liquid is placed in a vessel and scented air is activated via hand or foot pump. Heritage institutions tend to be more wary of diffusion that involves machines because they are more difficult to control.

A visitor sniffing a scent at the [Mondrian Moves exhibition](#) at the [Kunstmuseum Den Haag](#) in the Netherlands (2022) using the pump with a rubber bulb method. Photo credit Sofia Collette Ehrich.

You can see the 'pump with a rubber bulb' method in action to the right.

According to Hempenius, passive and active diffusion offer similar scent experiences, but he emphasises that he always considers the preference of the heritage professionals. It is important that they are comfortable with the experience and the diffusion can always be reassessed and adapted to their needs.

## *Jorg Hempenius offers the following personal experiences of using various presentation methods of scents in heritage spaces:*

#1. Pump with a rubber bulb method (active diffusion)

**JORG HEMPENIUS:** "The pump with a rubber bulb method can be described as when a liquid fragrance is placed in a hollow space – such as a bottle – and gets a puff of air via a (hand) pump. The pump method transports scented air to the participant upon engagement."



#2. Box with double bottom  
(active diffusion)

**JORG HEMPENIUS:** “This method places scented material inside a box that is nested inside something else like a wall, chest, plastic fixture. The scents can be safely experienced by approaching the fixture and sniffing via strategically placed holes. This is commonly used in fixed exhibition spaces.”

#3. Cartridges in hollow inside spaces with an air fan (passive diffusion)

**JORG HEMPENIUS:** “Scents can also be diffused ambiently making the scent experience more passive. Scents can be stored in any hollow space, and when air flows through this space supported by the ventilator, it will carry the smell molecules into the room through the air flow. This is how smell (in whatever quantity) may be distributed, depending on the power of the ventilator. In turn, this ventilator can be triggered by differing sensors. I always advise on the best balance between material quantity and the ventilator’s air flow power to stay within the institution’s limitations and still achieve their goals.”

#4. Scented paper cards  
(active diffusion)

**JORG HEMPENIUS:** “Scented paper cards are a durable and cheaper alternative to scratch and sniff cards. They absorb scent well and are easy to sniff without much interaction. A downside is that their scent tends to ‘leak’ more into the space so they should be packaged and stored in airtight containers when not in use.”

*How do you choose a scent distribution method when using malodours in heritage institutions?*

When using malodours, extra precautions are considered and it is best to use a method that allows the visitor to determine their own dosage of the scent. In this case, the pump with a rubber bulb method allows visitors control over their scent intake while still having an impactful experience. Hempenius also emphasises that a more contained method does not make the whole space smell bad, which is essential to keep in mind.

As someone who both creates scents and the design methods for their presentation, how do you ensure the safety of the heritage institution’s staff and visitors?



Odeuropa trainee, Christina Kotsopoulou sniffing a scented card at the [Delinking and Relinking](#) multisensory exhibition at the [Van Abbe Museum](#) in Eindhoven, the Netherlands. You can see the 'scented paper cards' method in action above. The method was applauded by staff and museum visitors for its ease of application and long lasting smell intensity.

It is crucial to keep to [IFRA Standards](#) and use high quality materials, which is especially important when scents are used in open spaces (ambient diffusion). He says that it is important to consider that allergens are everywhere – in natural or synthetic fragrance compositions – so when they are spread through space there is always the possibility of an allergic reaction or for annoyance to occur. However, Hempenius emphasises that in his experience, this has hardly ever happened. If costs and smell annoyance are a concern, it is best to follow modes of active diffusion.

*Jorg Hempenius' advice for starting your own olfactory events:*

- #1. "Understand the story: dive deep into the narrative that the cultural organisation wants to tell and identify its most important themes and emotions. This helps when deciding on specific scents which help emphasise the wider narrative."
- #2. "Dare to experiment with scent in spaces: individual artworks can benefit from a deepening of the experience through scent and the space itself can also enhance a specific ambiance by incorporating scent so all the featured artworks have more of an impact together."

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#3. “Test and evaluate: run tests to analyse how visitors respond to the smells and gather feedback. If necessary, alter the scent experience to reach the desired impact. Under-

stand that because curation with scent is always an experiment, you may not achieve 100% safety all of the time. It is good to understand your audience and adapt.”